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ABSTRACT

This ERIC Digest discusses heritage education in terms of: (1) what it is; (2) why it belongs in the core curriculum; (3) how it relates to social studies education; and (4) the qualities of exemplary heritage education programs. Heritage education is defined as an approach to teaching and learning about history and culture that uses information available from the material culture and the human and built environments as primary instructional resources. As part of schools' core curricula, heritage education supports U.S. unity and emphasizes the rich diversity of the U.S. population. The best method of including heritage education in the curriculum is to integrate it into existing curriculum patterns. This digest lists the National Trust for Historic Preservation's (Washington, D.C.) nine qualities of exemplary programs and references, including ERIC resources. (JHP)

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# HERITAGE EDUCATION IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES

by

Kathleen Hunter

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# Heritage Education in the Social Studies

by Kathleen Hunter

Curriculum reformers of the 1980s have called for emphasis on core content in the curriculum, knowledge that should be learned by all students to equip them for intelligent and fruitful participation in their society. Ernest Boyer (1983, 302), for example, has said: "A core of common learning is essential. The basic curriculum should be a study of those consequential ideas, experiences, and traditions common to all of us. . . ." Knowledge associated with heritage education belongs in the core curriculum, as part of the common learning of young Americans.

This ERIC Digest addresses the following questions about heritage education: (1) What is it? (2) Why does it belong in the core curriculum? (3) How is it connected to education in the social studies? (4) What are the qualities of exemplary heritage education programs?

**What Is Heritage Education?** Heritage education is an approach to teaching and learning about history and culture that uses information available from the material culture and the human and built environments as primary instructional resources. The heritage education approach is intended to strengthen students' understanding of concepts and principles about history and culture and to enrich their appreciation for the artistic achievements, technological genius, and social and economic contributions of men and women from diverse groups. Heritage education nourishes a sense of continuity and connectedness with our historical and cultural experience; encourages citizens to consider their historical and cultural experiences in planning for the future; and fosters stewardship towards the legacies of our local, regional, and national heritage.

Heritage education occurs whenever we interact with the world around us. It also occurs in elementary and secondary schools whenever teachers introduce examples of the material culture and built environment into lessons in the arts, humanities, sciences, and social studies. By directly experiencing, examining, and evaluating buildings, monuments, workplaces, landscapes, and other historic sites and artifacts—objects in our material culture and built environment—learners gain knowledge, intellectual skills, and attitudes that enhance their capacities for maintenance and improvement of our society and ways of living.

**Why Does Heritage Education Belong in the Core Curriculum of Schools?** Heritage education is compatible with proposals for a core curriculum and common learning advanced by Ernest Boyer, William Bennett, and many other curriculum reformers of the 1980s, because it includes "consequential ideas, experiences, and traditions common to all of us"—achievements and values tangibly represented by our built environment and artifacts. More than forty percent of the terms listed by Hirsch as essential to cultural literacy in the United States have a reference point in our built environment (1987, 152-215).

As part of a core curriculum in schools, heritage education supports the unity of the United States, a force for cohesion in a society marked by pluralism. Heritage education, properly conceived, also emphasizes the rich diversity of the American people, which is reflected in the built environment. Thus, teaching and learning about the built environment enhance learning of a fundamental paradox of our American nation—unity with diversity.

Knowledge and appreciation of national unity with social diversity are requirements of cultural literacy and citizenship in the United States. Tension between preservation of common values and acceptance of new cultural influences and experiences is an inescapable part of our American heritage. So is a workable blending of continuity and change, of preservation of a common heritage and integration of new ideas and experiences into it, thereby recreating a sense of cultural coherence and commonality from the fresh contributions of newcomers.

**How Is Heritage Education Connected to the Social Studies Curriculum?** The content of heritage education fits easily into established subjects of the social studies curriculum, such as history and geography. Consider five main themes of education in geography: (1) location, (2) place, (3) human-environment interactions, (4) movement of people, ideas, goods, (5) formation and change of regions (Joint Committee on Geographic Education 1984). Teaching and learning about each of these five themes are greatly enriched through use of the built environment. The same point can be made about main themes of historic literacy, such as time and chronology, continuity and change, common memory, historical empathy, and cause-effect relationships. These ideas can be included in the curriculum more realistically and interestingly through use of historic places and artifacts.

During the 1980s, there has been a strong revival of interest in history and geography as staples of elementary and secondary education in the social studies. According to John J. Patrick, director of Indiana University's Social Studies Development Center, the current emphasis on history and geography "bodes well for the contributions that historic preservation and heritage education might make to improvements in the curriculum of our schools.

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The objects of historic preservation can be connected to a curriculum dominated by history and geography" (1988, 7).

The best means for including heritage education in the curriculum is infusion—integration with existing curriculum patterns—rather than creation of new courses or stand-alone units of study. Established goals and subjects in the social studies provide numerous points of entry for teaching and learning about artifacts and the built environment. And the content of heritage education provides opportunities for connection of the social studies to other subjects in the curriculum, such as languages, literature, and fine arts.

**What Are the Qualities of Exemplary Heritage Education Programs?** The National Trust for Historic Preservation, chartered by the U.S. Congress in 1949, is committed to education of the public about the importance of knowing, valuing, and preserving its heritage. In line with this commitment, the National Trust's Task Force on Heritage Education has stated that exemplary programs should reflect

- an accurate, objective, and balanced interpretation of sites, landscapes, structures, and objects, establishing the appropriate context for and conveying the reality of the place in the American historical and cultural experience;
- the rich historical and cultural contributions of men and women from diverse regional, racial, and ethnic groups, and the legacies of these contributions in the texture and shape of our built environment;
- the expressions of America's historical and cultural experience found in local, state, and regional environments;
- an interdisciplinary approach to the study of American history and culture, incorporating information from the liberal and fine arts and sciences;
- a vision for a quality of life for Americans as this is presented in the "preservation ethic" espoused by the historic preservation community;
- an instructional design and curriculum content that has been developed with and for teachers at various grade levels, in cooperation with well-prepared historians and preservationists who will remain involved in implementation of the program;
- integration with the existing curriculum developed for each grade level within the elementary and secondary system, and adaptation to the realities of the local educational environment;
- support for the educational mission, goals, and priorities of the elementary, secondary, and higher education systems articulated by the major national professional organizations and by local, state, and federal agencies;
- support for the values and practices of informed stewardship towards America's historical and cultural legacies in landscapes, sites, structures, and objects.

Exemplary programs in heritage education move students beyond the pages of textbooks and worksheets to interpretation of evidence from various sources: documents, artifacts, and various objects of the built environment. Video programs and photographs (slide shows and bulletin board displays) are especially effective means of bringing examples from the built environment into the classroom. Students can be required to use these visual materials as sources of evidence about the past in the same way that written primary sources are used in a sound history course. Teachers might also use field trips to historic landmark sites as sources of data to interpret, analyze, and evaluate.

In conclusion, high-quality programs in heritage education enhance the teaching and learning of core subjects in the social studies, such as history and geography. Through this enrichment of the core curriculum, heritage education contributes to the common learning and cultural literacy of students.

**References and ERIC Resources**

The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are in the ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center) system and are available in microfiche and/or paper copies from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, write EDRS, 1900 Wheeler Avenue, Alexandria, VA 22304 or call 800-227-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number are annotated monthly in CIJE (*Current Index to Journals in Education*), which is available in most libraries. EJ documents are not available through EDRS; however, they can be located in the journal section of most libraries by using bibliographic information provided below.


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